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ESSAY

You're On Your Own

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, June 10 — As we enter the News Doldrums — that mid-summer period in which events overtake nothing — this department closes down. For readers who may need quick opinion fixes over the coming weeks, here are a few mini-diatribes.

C.I.A.'s Biggest Flop

Claire Sterling reports in The New York Times that an Italian prosecutor has assembled massive evidence that the Bulgarian secret service — obviously under orders of then-K.G.B. chief Yuri Andropov — arranged the attempted assassination of the Pope.

From the start, this story was minimized and ridiculed by our C.I.A. The station chief in Rome, as well as intelligence evaluators in Langley, Va., did their best to discredit the reports of Miss Sterling in the Reader's Digest and of Marvin Kalb on N.B.C.

Now that the proof is about to be laid on the table, this question arises: what is the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board doing to find out why President Reagan was misled by the C.I.A. on the most important terrorist plot in modern history? Certainly Clare Booth Luce, a PFIAB member, should press for the appointment of a "team B" to independently establish the reasons for our poor covert intelligence and our inept evaluation.

Senator Barry Goldwater should also look into the blunder: one of his intelligence committee staffers was present when a C.I.A. man in Rome tried to belittle the Italian investigation. (After a recent barb in this space about his lack of alertness in picking up testimony on the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, the Senator wrote to tell me "You go your way and I'll go mine." Sorry about that; he is the last of the lively letter-writers.)

Shamir Bis Du Schoen

The election campaign in Israel should liven up in the next month. Opinion polls show labor well in the lead, but many Israeli voters contemplate 400 percent inflation the way Americans look at a \$200 billion defi-

cit: one of these days, we really ought to be horrified.

Labor's Shimon Peres, the Adlai Stevenson of Israel, is trying to keep attention centered on the economy. His opponent, the Likud's low-key Yitzhak Shamir, has not yet countered with what could be his most effective charge: that if Labor takes control again, there goes Israel's West Bank.

Look for a tightened-up race, and a squeaker on July 23d, with a subsequent push for a coalition government.

The Erosion Explosion

The Mondale story is now "It's all over, and Gary Hart need not pull out — but he should be nice." That story should last only a couple of weeks, then the key word will become "erosion." Can Mondale hold on to his fringe delegates, beyond those won in primaries, if polls show Hart to be a stronger candidate against the President? Much will be made of any switches, as news-parched pundits seek a counter-trend to take a column on. "Erosion" is Mr. Mondale's worry-word, and "electability" is the name of the Hart endgame.

The Two-Eye League

Americans find it difficult to choose between Iran and Iraq in their war because there is only a one-letter difference in their names. The side that will win is the one with the "n."

The Reagan position is to resolutely refrain from mixing in unless the Arabs say "please," at which time we will send Cap Weinberger to Riyadh to beg for permission to use the Saudi landing field from which to bomb their enemies. That would be the most foolish U.S. intervention since we stopped Israel from driving the P.L.O. and Syrians out of Lebanon.

Turn Down An Empty Glass

Two weeks ago, a lawyer and an investigator from the Los Angeles District Attorney's office came to Washington to interview U.S.I.A. Director Charles Wick, Senator Charles Percy, Interior Secretary William Clark and seven others. Their purpose was to determine whether a California state law was broken when Mr. Wick secretly taped telephone calls while in California. The Los Angeles District Attorney, a Republican, will decide by the end of June whether or not to proffer charges. My unsubstantiated guess is that the prosecutor is aware that this could embarrass the President in an election year. Meanwhile, Senators Metzenbaum and Bumpers are testifying before a Senate Judiciary subcommittee next week on their bill to make such unethical taping a Federal crime.

At a steak house in Washington the other day, Charles Wick came over to my table and said "Safire, you're a hell of an adversary." As he extended his hand, he inadvertently knocked a glass of ice water into my lap. I believe it was accidental; besides, in this heat, it felt good.